

Sanctification

by Thomas Watson

Sanctification is the will of God, and it is necessary for us to be holy, as it gives us a pure complexion, makes us as the heavens, bespangled with stars, and is the evidence of God's love.

Scripture: Isaiah 63:18, Colossians 1:12, 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 2 Timothy 2:19, Titus 3:3, 1 Peter 1:15, 1 Peter 2:5

Topics: "Christian Living", "Sanctification"

Description

Thomas Watson preaches about the importance, nature, counterfeits, necessity, signs, pursuit, inducements, and attainment of sanctification. He emphasizes that sanctification is the will of God, essential for evidencing justification, a requirement for the new covenant, necessary for entering heaven, and the only thing that makes us differ from the wicked. Watson urges Christians to pursue sanctification above all else, as it is the evidence of God's love, fits us for heaven, and is the main thing a Christian should seek after. He provides practical steps to attain sanctification, such as being in the Word, having faith in Christ's blood, seeking the Holy Spirit, associating with sanctified people, and praying for sanctification.

Transcript

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"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification." 1 Thessalonians 4:3

The word sanctification signifies to consecrate and set apart to a holy use: thus they are sanctified people who are separated from the world, and set apart for God's service. Sanctification has a privative and a positive part.

I. A privative part, which lies in the purging out of sin. Sin is compared to leaven, which sours; and to leprosy, which defiles. Sanctification purges out "the old leaven." Though it does not take away the life of sin--yet it takes away the love of sin.

II. A positive part, which is the spiritual refining of the soul; which in Scripture is called a "renewing of our mind," and a "partaking of the divine nature." The priests in the law were not only washed in the great laver--but adorned with glorious apparel. Exodus 28:2. Just so, sanctification not only washes from sin--but adorns with purity.

What is the NATURE of sanctification?

It is a principle of grace savingly wrought, whereby the heart becomes holy, and is made after God's own heart. A sanctified person bears not only God's name--but his image. In opening the nature of sanctification, I shall lay down these seven positions:

(1.) Sanctification is a SUPERNATURAL thing; it is divinely infused. We are naturally polluted, and to cleanse, God takes to be his prerogative. "I am the Lord, who sanctifies you." Weeds grow by themselves. Flowers must be planted and cultivated. Sanctification is a flower of the Spirit's planting, therefore it is called, "The sanctification of the Spirit." 1 Pet 1:2.

(2.) Sanctification is an INTERNAL thing; it lies chiefly in the heart. It is called "the adorning the hidden man of the heart." 1 Pet 3:4. The dew wets the leaf--but the sap is hidden in the root. Just so, the religion of some consists only in externals--but sanctification is deeply rooted in the soul. "In the hidden part you shall make me to know wisdom." Psalm 51:6.

(3.) Sanctification is an EXTENSIVE thing: it spreads into the whole man. "May the God of peace sanctify you wholly." As original corruption has depraved all the faculties--"the whole head is sick, the whole heart faint," no part sound, as if the whole volume of blood were corrupted; just so, sanctification goes over the whole soul. After the fall, there was ignorance in the mind; but in sanctification, we are "light in the Lord." After the fall, the will was depraved; there was not only impotence to good--but obstinacy. In sanctification, there is a blessed pliability in the will, with the will of God. After the fall, the affections were misplaced on wrong objects; in sanctification, they are turned into a sweet order and harmony--the grief placed on sin, the love on God, the joy on heaven. Thus sanctification spreads itself as far as original corruption; it goes over the whole soul. "May God of peace sanctify you wholly." He is not a sanctified person who is good only in some part--but who is all over sanctified; therefore, in Scripture, grace is called a "new man," not a new eye or a new tongue--but a "new man." Col 3:10. A good Christian, though he is sanctified but in part--yet in every part.

(4.) Sanctification is an intense and ARDENT thing. Its properties burn within the believer. "Fervent in spirit." Rom 12:2. Sanctification is not a dead form--but it is inflamed into zeal. We call water hot, when it is so in the third or fourth degree. Just so, he is holy whose true religion is heated to some degree, and his heart boils over in love to God.

(5.) Sanctification is a BEAUTIFUL thing. It makes God and angels fall in love with us. "The beauties of holiness." Psalm 110:3. As the sun is to the world, so is sanctification to the soul, beautifying and bespangling it in God's eyes. That which makes God glorious must needs make us so. Holiness is the most sparkling jewel in the Godhead. "Glorious in holiness." Sanctification is the first fruit of the Spirit; it is heaven begun in the soul. Sanctification and glory differ only in degree. Sanctification is glory in the seed; and glory is sanctification in the flower. Holiness is the quintessence of happiness.

(6.) Sanctification is an ABIDING thing. "His seed remains in him." He who is truly sanctified, cannot fall from that state. Indeed, mere seeming holiness may be lost--colors may wash off. Sanctification may suffer an eclipse. "You have left your first love." True sanctification is a blossom of eternity. "The anointing which you have received, abides in you." He who is truly sanctified can no more fall away, than the angels which are fixed in their heavenly orbs.

(7.) Sanctification is a PROGRESSIVE thing. It is growing; it is compared to seed which grows: first the blade springs up, then the ear, then the ripe corn in the ear. Such as are already sanctified may be more sanctified. Justification does not admit of degrees; a believer cannot be more elected or justified than he is--but he may be more sanctified than he is. Sanctification is still increasing, like the morning sun, which grows brighter to the full meridian. Knowledge is said to increase, and faith to increase. Col 1:10; 2 Cor 10:5. A Christian is continually adding an inch to his spiritual stature. It is not with us as it was with Christ, who received the Spirit without measure; for Christ could not be more holy than he was. We have the Spirit only in measure, and may be still augmenting our grace; as Apelles, when he had drawn a picture, would be still mending it with his pencil. The image of God is drawn but imperfectly in us, therefore we must be still mending it, and drawing it in more lively colors. Sanctification is progressive; if it does not grow--it is because it does not live. Thus you see the nature of sanctification.

What are the COUNTERFEITS of sanctification?

There are things which look like sanctification--but are not.

(1.) The first counterfeit of sanctification is MORAL VIRTUE. To be just, to be temperate, to have a kind demeanor; not to have one's escutcheon blotted with ignominious scandal, is good--but not enough; it is not sanctification. A field-flower differs from a garden-flower. Many heathen have attained to morality; as Cato, Socrates, and Aristides have. Civility is but nature refined; there is nothing of Christ there, and the heart may be foul and impure. Under these beautiful leaves of civility the worm of unbelief may be hidden! A moral person has a secret antipathy against grace: he hates vice, and he hates grace as much as vice. The snake has a beautiful color--but a sting. A person adorned and cultivated with moral virtue, has a secret spleen against sanctity. The Stoics who were the chief of the moralized heathens, were the bitterest enemies Paul had. Acts 17:18.

(2.) The second counterfeit of sanctification is SUPERSTITIOUS DEVOTION. This abounds in Popery; adorations, images, altars, vestments, and holy water--are far from sanctification. This religious frenzy does not put any intrinsic goodness into a man, it does not make a man better. If the legal purifications and washings, which were of God's own appointing, did not make those who used them more holy; and the priests, who wore holy garments, and had holy oil poured on them--were not more holy without the anointing of the Spirit; then surely those superstitious innovations in religion, which God never appointed, cannot contribute any holiness to men. A superstitious holiness costs no great labor; there is nothing of the heart in it. If to count over a few beads, or bow to an idol, or sprinkle themselves with holy water were sanctification, and all that is required of those who should be saved--then hell would be empty, none would go there!

(3.) The third counterfeit of sanctification is HYPOCRISY; when men make a pretense of that holiness which they have not. As a comet may shine like a star--a luster may shine from their profession, which dazzles the eyes of the beholders. "Having a form of godliness--but denying the power." These are lamps without oil; whited sepulchres, like the Egyptian temples, which had beautiful outsides--but within were filled with spiders and vermin. The apostle speaks of true holiness, Eph 4:24; implying that there is holiness which is spurious and sham. "You have a name to live--but are dead;" like pictures and statues which are destitute of a vital principle. "Clouds without water." They pretend to be full of the Spirit--but are empty clouds.

This show of sanctification is a self-delusion. He who takes copper instead of gold, wrongs himself; the most counterfeit professor deceives others while he lives--but deceives himself when he dies! To pretend to holiness when there is none, is a vain thing. What were the foolish virgins the better, for their fine lamps, when they lacked oil? What is the lamp of profession, without the oil of saving grace? What comfort will a show of holiness yield at last? Will painted gold enrich? Will painted wine refresh him who is thirsty? Will painted holiness be a cordial at the hour of death? A pretense of sanctification is not to be rested in. Many ships, that have had the name of 'the Hope', 'the Safeguard', 'the Triumph', have been dashed and destroyed upon rocks. Just so, many who have had the name of saints--have been cast into hell.

(4.) The fourth counterfeit of sanctification is RESTRAINING grace--when men forbear vice, though they do not hate it. This may be the sinner's motto, "Gladly I would--but I dare not." The dog has a mind to the bone--but is afraid of the cudgel. Just so, men have a mind to lust--but conscience stands as the angel, with a flaming sword, and affrights them. They have a mind to revenge--but the fear of hell is a curb-bit to check them. There is no change of heart; sin is curbed--but not cured. A lion may be in chains--but is a lion still.

(5.) The fifth counterfeit of sanctification is COMMON grace--which is a slight, transient work of the Spirit--but does not amount to conversion. There is some light in the judgement--but it is not humbling. There are some checks in the conscience--but they are not awakening. This looks like sanctification--but is not. Men have convictions wrought in them--but they break loose from them again, like the deer, which, being shot, shakes out the arrow. After conviction, men go into the house of mirth, and take the harp to drive away the spirit of sadness--and so all dies and comes to nothing.

Wherein appears the NECESSITY of sanctification? In six things:

(1.) God has called us to it. "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." 2 Peter 1:3. We are called to goodness, as well as glory. "God has not called us to uncleanness--but unto holiness." We have no call to sin; we may have a temptation--but no call to sin; no call to be proud, or unclean; but we have a call to be holy.

(2.) Without sanctification, there is no evidencing our justification. Justification and sanctification go together. "But you are sanctified--but you are justified." "Pardoning iniquity," Micah 7:18; there is justification. "He will subdue our iniquities," 5:19; there is sanctification. "Out of Christ's side came blood and water;" blood for justification; water for sanctification. Such as have not the water out of Christ's side to cleanse them, shall never have the blood out of his side to save them.

(3.) Without sanctification we have no title to the new covenant. The covenant of grace is our charter for heaven. The condition of the covenant is, "That God will be our God." But who are savingly interested in the covenant, and may plead the benefit of it? Sanctified people only. "A new heart will I give you, and I will put my Spirit within you, and I will be your God." If a man makes a will, none but such people as are named in the will, can lay claim to the will. Just so, God makes a will and testament--but it is limited to such as are sanctified; and it is high presumption for anyone else to lay claim to the will.

(4.) There is no going to heaven without sanctification. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." God is a holy God, and he will allow no unholy creature to come near him. A king will not allow a man with plague-sores to approach into his presence. Heaven is not like Noah's ark--where the clean beasts and the unclean entered. No unclean beasts come into the heavenly ark; for though God allows the wicked to

live awhile on the earth, he will never allow heaven to be pestered with such vermin! Are they fit to see God--who wallow in wickedness? Will God ever lay such vipers in his bosom? "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." It must be a clear eye that sees a bright object: only a holy heart can see God in his glory. Sinners may see God as an enemy--but not as a friend! They will have an affrighting vision of him--but not a beatific vision! They will see the flaming sword--but not the mercy-seat! Oh then, what need is there of sanctification!

(5.) Without sanctification all our holy things are defiled. "Unto those who are defiled, is nothing pure." Under the law, "If one of you is carrying a holy sacrifice in his robes and happens to brush against some bread or stew, wine or oil, or any other kind of food--will it also become holy?" No, the holy sacrifice would not purify the other things--but it would be polluted by those things. Hag 2:12, 13. This is an emblem of a sinner's polluting his holy offering. A foul stomach turns the best food into ill humours. Just so, an unsanctified heart pollutes prayers, alms, and sacraments. This evinces the necessity of sanctification. Sanctification makes our holy things accepted. A holy heart is the altar, which sanctifies the offering; if not to our satisfaction, yet to God's acceptance.

(6.) Without sanctification we can show no sign of our election. 2 Thess 2:13. Election is the cause of our salvation, sanctification is our evidence. Sanctification is the ear-mark of Christ's elect sheep.

What are the SIGNS of sanctification?

First, such as are sanctified, can remember a time when they were unsanctified. "Once we too were foolish and disobedient. We were misled by others and became slaves to many wicked desires and evil pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy. We hated others, and they hated us. But then God our Savior showed us his kindness and love. He saved us, not because of the good things we did, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins and gave us a new life through the Holy Spirit." Titus 3:3-5. We were in our blood, and then God washed us with water, and anointed us with oil. Ezek 16:9. Those trees of righteousness which blossom and bear almonds, can remember when they were like Aaron's dry rod--not one blossom of holiness growing. A sanctified soul can remember when it was estranged from God through ignorance and vanity--and when free grace planted this flower of holiness in it.

A second sign of sanctification is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. "The Holy Spirit which dwells in us." An unclean spirit dwells in the wicked and carries them to pride, lust, revenge; the devil enters into these swine! But the Spirit of God dwells in the elect, as their guide and comforter. The Spirit possesses the saints. God's Spirit sanctifies the imagination, causing it to mint holy thoughts; and sanctifies the will by putting a new bias upon it, whereby it is inclined to godliness. He who is sanctified, has the influence of the Spirit, though not the essence of the Spirit.

A third sign of sanctification is an antipathy against sin. "I hate every wrong path." Psalm 119:104. A hypocrite may leave sin--yet love it; as a serpent casts its coat--but keeps its sting! But a sanctified person can say he not only leaves sin--but loathes it. In a sanctified soul, there is a holy antipathy against sin; and antipathies can never be reconciled. Because a man has an antipathy against sin--he cannot but oppose it, and seek the destruction of it.

A fourth sign of sanctification is the spiritual performance of duties, with the heart, and from a principle of love. The sanctified soul prays out of a love to prayer. A man may have gifts to admiration; he may speak as an angel dropped out of heaven--yet he may be carnal in spiritual things; his services may not come

from a renewed principle, nor be carried upon the wings of delight in duty. A sanctified soul worships God in the Spirit. "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 2:5. God judges not of our duties by their length--but by the love from which they spring.

A fifth sign is a holy life. "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do." 1 Peter 1:15. Where the heart is sanctified, the life will be holy. The temple had gold without, as well as within. A coin has the king's image and superscription stamped on it. Just so, where there is sanctification, there is not only God's image in the heart--but a superscription of holiness written in the life. Some say they have good hearts--but their lives are wicked. "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness." If the water is foul in the bucket, it cannot be clean in the well. "The king's daughter is all glorious within." Psalm 45:13. There is holiness of heart. "Her clothing is of wrought gold." There is holiness of life. Grace is most beautiful, when its light so shines that others may see it; this adorns true religion, and makes proselytes to the faith.

A sixth sign is steadfast resolution. He is resolved never to part with his holiness. Let others reproach it--he loves it the more. Let water be sprinkled on the fire--it burns the more. He says, as David, when Michal reproached him for dancing before the ark, "If this is to be vile--I will yet be more vile!" Let others persecute him for his holiness, he says as Paul, "None of these things move me!" He prefers sanctity before safety; and had rather keep his conscience pure than his skin whole. He says as Job, "My integrity I will hold fast, and not let it go!" He will rather part with his life, than his conscience.

Use one: The main thing a Christian should look after, is sanctification. This is "the one thing needful." Sanctification gives us a pure complexion, it makes us as the heavens, bespangled with stars. Sanctification is our nobility, by it we are born of God, and partake of the divine nature. Sanctification is our riches, therefore compared to rows of jewels, and chains of gold. Canticles 1:10. Sanctification is our best certificate for heaven. What evidence have we else to show? Have we knowledge? So has the devil. Do we profess religion? Satan often appears in Samuel's mantle, and transforms himself into an angel of light. But our certificate for heaven is sanctification. Sanctification is the first fruits of the Spirit; the only coin that will pass current in the other world. Sanctification is the evidence of God's love. We cannot know God's saving love by his giving us health, riches, or success; but only by the drawing his image of sanctification on us, by the pencil of the Holy Spirit--it is known.

Oh the misery of such as are destitute of a principle of sanctification! They are spiritually dead. Eph 2:1. Though they breathe--yet they do not live. The greatest part of the world remains unsanctified. "The world lies in wickedness." That is, the major part of the world. Many call themselves Christians--but blot out the word 'saints'. You may as well call him a man--who lacks reason; as him a Christian--who lacks grace.

Some are buoyed up to such a height of wickedness, that they hate and deride sanctification. They hate it. It is bad to lack holiness--it is worse to hate it. They embrace the form of religion--but hate the power. As the vulture hates sweet smells--so they hate the perfume of holiness. They say in derision, 'These are your holy ones!' To deride sanctification argues a high degree of atheism, and is a black brand of reprobation. Scoffing Ishmael was cast out of Abraham's family; and such as scoff at holiness shall be cast out of heaven!

Use two: Above all things pursue after sanctification. Seek grace more than gold. "Keep her, for she is your life!"

What are the chief INDUCEMENTS to sanctification?

(1.) It is the will of God that we should be holy. "This is the will of God--your sanctification." As God's Word must be the rule, so his will must be the reason of our actions. This is the will of God--our sanctification. Perhaps it is not the will of God we should be rich--but it is his will that we should be holy. God's will is our warrant.

(2.) Jesus Christ has died for our sanctification. Christ shed his blood to wash off our impurity. The cross was both an altar and a laver. "Our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." Titus 2:13-14. If we could be saved without holiness, Christ needed not have died. Christ died, not only to save us from wrath--but from sin!

(3.) Sanctification makes us resemble God. It was Adam's sin--that he aspired to be like God in omniscience; but we must endeavor to be like him in sanctity. It is a clear glass--in which we can see a face; it is a holy heart--in which something of God can be seen. Nothing of God can be seen in an unsanctified man--but you may see Satan's picture in him. Envy is the devil's eye, hypocrisy his cloven foot; but nothing of God's image can be seen in him. "Just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written--Be holy, because I am holy." 1 Peter 1:15-16.

(4.) Sanctification is that which God bears a great love to. God is not drawn to any person's outward beauty, great abilities, noble blood, or worldly grandeur. But he is drawn to a heart embellished with holiness! Christ never admired anything but the beauty of holiness. He slighted the glorious buildings of the temple--but admired the woman's faith, and said, "O woman, great is your faith." As a king delights to see his image upon a piece of coin; so where God sees his likeness--he gives his love. The Lord has two heavens to dwell in--and the holy heart is one of them!

(5.) Sanctification is the only thing which makes us differ from the wicked. God's people have his seal upon them. "The foundation of God stands sure, having this seal--The Lord knows those who are his. And, Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." 2 Tim 2:19. The godly are sealed with a double seal--a seal of election, "The Lord knows who are his;" and a seal of sanctification, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." This is the name by which God's people are known, "The people of your holiness." Isa 63:18. As chastity distinguishes a virtuous woman from a harlot, so sanctification distinguishes God's people from others. "You have received an anointing from the Holy One." 1 John 2:20.

(6.) It is as great a shame to have the name of a Christian--yet lack sanctity--as to have the name of a steward and lack fidelity; or the name of a virgin, and lack chastity. It exposes true religion to reproach--to be baptized into the name of Christ while unholy, and to have eyes full of tears on a sabbath, and on a week-day eyes full of adultery! To be so devout at the Lord's table, as if they were stepping into heaven; and so profane the day after, as if they came out of hell! To have the name of 'Christian' while living unholy, is a scandal to true religion, and makes the ways of God to be evil spoken of.

(7.) Sanctification fits for heaven. "Who has called us to glory and virtue." Glory is the throne, and sanctification is the step by which we ascend to it. As you first cleanse the vessel, and then pour in the wine; just so, God first cleanses us by sanctification, and then pours in the wine of glory. Solomon was first anointed with oil, and then was a king. First God anoints us with the holy oil of his Spirit, and then sets the crown of happiness upon our head. Pureness of heart and seeing God are linked together. Matt 5:8.

How may sanctification be ATTAINED?

(1.) Be conversant in the word of God. "Sanctify them through your truth." John 17:17. The Word is both a mirror to show us the spots of our soul, and a laver to wash them away. The Word has a transforming virtue in it; it irradiates the mind, and consecrates the heart.

(2.) Get faith in Christ's blood. "Having purified their hearts by faith." She in the gospel, who touched the hem of Christ's garment, was healed. A touch of faith purifies! Nothing can have a greater force upon the heart, to sanctify it, than faith. If I believe Christ and his merits are mine--how can I sin against him? Justifying faith does that in a spiritual sense, which miraculous faith does--it removes mountains, the mountains of pride, lust, envy. True faith, and the love of sin, are inconsistent.

(3.) Breathe after the Spirit. "The sanctification of the Spirit." The Spirit sanctifies the heart, as the storm purifies the air, and as fire refines metals. The Spirit at work, generates his own likeness. The Spirit stamps the impression of its own sanctity upon the heart, as the seal prints its likeness upon the wax. The Spirit of God in a man perfumes him with holiness, and makes his heart a picture of heaven.

(4.) Associate with sanctified people. They may, by their counsel, prayers, and holy example, be a means to make you holy. As the communion of saints is in our creed, so it should be our company. "He who walks with the wise shall be wise." Association begets assimilation.

(5.) Pray for sanctification. Job propounds a question. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" God can do it! Out of an unholy heart--he can produce grace! Oh! make David's prayer your own, "Create in me a clean heart, O God." Lay your heart before the Lord, and say, "Lord, my unsanctified heart pollutes all it touches. I am not fit to live with such a heart, for I cannot honor you; nor die with such a heart, for I cannot see you. Oh create in me a new heart! Lord, consecrate my heart, and make it your temple, and your praises shall be sung there forever!"

Use three: Has God brought a clean thing out of an unclean? Has he sanctified you? Wear this jewel of sanctification with THANKFULNESS. "Always thanking the Father, who has enabled you to share the inheritance that belongs to God's holy people, who live in the light." Colossians 1:12. Christian, you could defile yourself--but you could not sanctify yourself. But God has done it--he has not only chained up sin--but changed your nature--and made you as a king's daughter--all glorious within! He has put upon you the breastplate of holiness, which, though it may be shot at, can never be shot through.

Are there any here who are sanctified? God has done more for you than for millions, who may have many temporal blessings--but are not sanctified. He has done more for you than if he had made you an earthly king! Are you sanctified? Heaven is begun in you--for happiness is nothing but the quintessence of holiness. Oh, how thankful should you be to God! Do as that blind man in the gospel did after he had received his sight, who "followed Christ, glorifying God." Make heaven ring with God's praises!

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